

# Building sacred spaces beyond the church: spirituality honoured at home and work.

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ANNE Elliott and Patricia Smith both have a "sacred space" in their homes. There is also a sacred mantle-top space at Spiritworks, the business they own in Saskatoon.

"More and more people are creating sacred spaces for themselves," Ms. Elliott said. "They are realizing the sacred exists over and above any church they might go to on a Sunday morning. And they want to honour the spirituality in their lives at home, at work, at play and in the community."

What exactly is a sacred space? "It's a special place where you can meditate and be still," Ms. Elliott explained. "It's a place to say a prayer and read some inspirational passage. It's a place where you can be quiet and honour the sacred within you and the sacred without."

"Sacred spaces have an aspect of balance," Ms. Smith said. "They remind us to think of our higher purpose on a daily basis. They turn our attention away from our stresses and bring a feeling of peace and harmony."

The two women grew up together in St. Catharines, Ont., attending Grace Anglican Church. Ms. Elliott now attends St. John's Cathedral in Saskatoon. Ms. Smith relies on meditation, yoga and a study of Eastern religion.

Sacred spaces are most often created at home, "because home is more and more a place where we spend a lot of time," Ms. Elliott said. "There seems to be a trend away from focusing only on interior decor and how it looks to the outside world, and a move toward making our homes feel safe and sacred, places where we can celebrate spirituality."

In creating a sacred space, Ms. Smith encourages including symbols of the four elements: earth, air, water, and fire, "which come from ancient aboriginal cultures and signify balance -- the elements of the earth from which we ourselves and the earth are made."

"Earth may be represented by a stone, a plant, or some sand, maybe from a sacred site like Jerusalem or Egypt. For air, I use feathers. It could be incense. Fire is usually candles."

"The water element could be shells from the sea, a small fountain, a container of holy water that's been blessed, water that has come from a special place."

"What goes into a sacred space will be different for each person," Ms. Elliott added. "Some will create a mantle-top space. Others will use an area in their bedroom or the spot where they

meditate. You could set aside a whole room, or where there's limited space, one special shelf. You can even have a sacred space on your office desk."

When Ms. Elliott created her first sacred space on a little table in her home-based office, choosing what would go into it was a three-week process.

"I finally chose a lace tablecloth which was a connection to my grandmother and what she meant in my life, some stones collected on different vacations which reminded me of the earth and the particularly positive experiences I'd had with the land, and a picture of my father who had recently died."

She also included a set of meditation cards with spiritual messages drawn from various sources.

Some people, she said, might have an open Bible or other sacred writing from which they would read each time they visit the sacred space.

Ms. Smith's sacred space was created with her husband after the two returned from a retreat. "When my husband died," she recalled, "we were able to take everything from our sacred space to the memorial service. It was important for the people who came to be able to get in touch with what was important to him."

She added: "Sacred spaces have a lot of significance during the times of passage in your life or the lives of people close to you."

"I think many people have been doing this unconsciously for years," Ms. Smith said, "but now people are being more intentional and incorporating different resources and spiritual tools from different cultures." She indicated a pair of flat brass bells connected by a cord. "These Tibetan ting schaw bells, for instance, are a good way to start a meditation or devotional, to focus attention, and clarify your mental energy."

To Ms. Elliott, the fact that more people are learning about the ancient Chinese art of feng shui is also a positive thing. "Feng shui deals with placement and addresses balance," she said. "This, again, is a trend away from decorating for appearance to creating a nice energy in your home by the way you place things."

"In creating a sacred space, think about what's important to you," she urged. "It might include an image or a picture of someone who is important in your life. Perhaps something that someone has given you, Put personal things in your sacred space. The items don't have to be static. They can change from month to month if you choose."

For anyone uncertain where to begin, the women recommend the Prayer and Meditation Room, a kit developed by Donna Millar, an Anglican laywoman from British Columbia. The boxed kit includes a cloth, a finely carved wooden box with a package of cards on which to write prayers or meditations, a brass picture frame to hold the image of someone special, and a booklet to help the person get started.